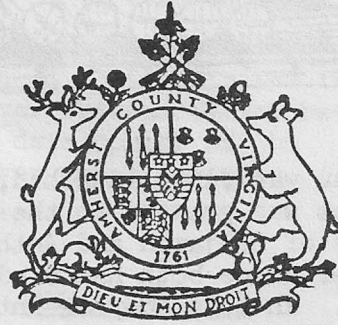


THE



MUSE

Amherst County Historical Museum

APRIL 1986

NO# 61

AN AMHERST INVENTION

The James River Bateau was a river boat developed by Benjamin and Anthony Rucker of Amherst in the early 1770's. The bateau was used to transport tobacco from the western reaches of the Virginia Colony to the Tidewater. It replaced the Rose Canoe (Fig. 1), an earlier frontier boat made of two Indian dugouts strapped together.

In May of 1771 there was an immense flood on the James River that ruined the river towns all through Central Virginia. Many of the double-dugout canoes were destroyed, and during the re-

building process the Ruckers introduced their bateau.

Thomas Jefferson had apparently never seen a craft like this before. In his notes from April 29, 1775 he describes the "Rucker's Battoe" as being fifty feet long, four feet wide at the bottom and six feet wide at the top. It would only draw thirteen inches of water when fully loaded with 11 hogheads of tobacco.

In order to secure the rights to the Bateau, the Ruckers were eventually convinced to acquire a patent for it. In 1821, approximately 50 years after the



Fig. 1

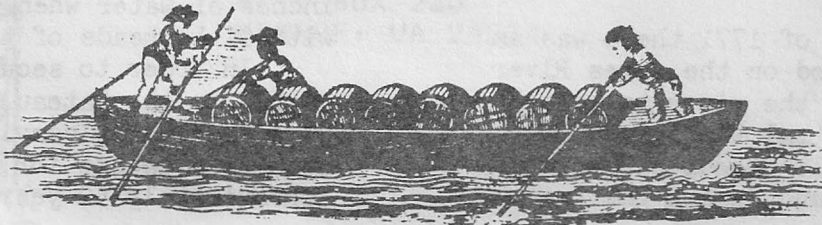
Bateau was first launched, the patent was granted to the descendants of Benjamin and Anthony Rucker since both had died by that time. In this 50-year interlude, the idea had arisen that the Bateau was a common craft which had developed without an inventor. Some claimed that the family of the Ruckers was misusing the patent system and that no two people were responsible for creating the bateau. When the debate became public, Thomas Jefferson, who saw the first launching, was willing to testify on behalf of the Ruckers' claim to the patent. With Jefferson as the authority for the debate the issue was settled in favor of the Ruckers.

The bateau continued to be an influence on the James for many years after the patent was granted. Even after the long-awaited James River Canal reached Amherst County and larger packet boats began to be towed up the river, this unique

craft continued to be used throughout Virginia. It was not until the Railroad replaced river transportation that the James River Bateau became obsolete and forgotten by later generations.

* * * * *

Now, nearly one hundred years after the Bateaux vanished from the James River and its tributaries, they have made a comeback. The bateau Columbia, taken down the James River in 1984, was the first reproduction to make the trip to Richmond. The new Spirit of Amherst bateau built in Amherst County is now complete. It is 50 feet long and 8 feet wide, and will be launched and christened on April 19, 1986. It will be entered in the James Cup Race from Lynchburg to Richmond on May 31, and later will be exhibited near the County museum. This replica is a physical link with the important era of the plantation economy, tobacco trade and river transportation in Amherst County.



MEMBERSHIP DRIVE LUNCHEON

There will be a kick-off lunch Wednesday, May 7th at 12:00 noon. It will be held at the Howard Johnson's Restaurant in Madison Heights. The luncheon will be for any volunteers who are willing to work on this year's membership drive. Volunteers will be given membership packages for prospective new members of the Heritage Guild.

If you are interested in helping your local museum, come to the luncheon on May 7. If you are unable to attend the luncheon but would like to help with the membership drive, please call the museum office (946-9348 or 929-9348).

GENEALOGY WORKSHOP

Thirty-seven people filled the Board of Supervisors' Room on March 25 for the genealogy workshop presented by Mrs. Florence Nixon. County Clerk Roy Mayo's guided tour through the County archives after the workshop was very informative. Members of the Heritage Guild learned how to begin a search on a family tree and what resources are available to them in the County records.



SPRING/SUMMER EXHIBIT

B.C.: Before the Canal on the James River illustrates the James River Transportation before the development of the James River Canal. Begins April 18.

NEW ACCESSIONS

- Hand-held School Bell--
Kathleen Proffitt
- 1914 Color Postcard of Amherst--
Mrs. Judson McIvor
- 1914 Postcard of Amherst Court-
house--
Mrs. Roger Beidler
- 1966 Railway Schedules--
Mrs. George White

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

The next Executive Board meeting has been set for 2:00 p.m. April 30 in the General District Court building.

MARCH VISITATION

On Site.....	61
Off-Site Presentations.....	80
TOTAL.....	<u>141</u>



Support your local museum now!
Join the HERITAGE GUILD!!

Membership fees

Individual	
Active	\$ 7.00—
Senior	\$ 4.00—
Student	\$ 4.00—
Life	\$ 100.00—

VOLUNTEER STAFF

For those in the community who want the opportunity to be involved on the "inside" of a museum, we are developing a volunteer staff. The time contributed can be decided by the volunteer's own schedule. With summer fast approaching more volunteers are needed to handle the extra work due to increased visitation. We need clerical, sales shop, guiding and maintenance help. If you want to volunteer, please contact Tom Mackie at the museum (946-9348 or 929-9348).

Name

Mailing address

Community

Please make checks payable to the Amherst County Historical Museum. This is the best way to preserve your local heritage.

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